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BRITISH GOVERNMENT CUTS BBC EXTERNAL SERVICE BUDGET

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LONDON PRESS ASSOCIATION IN ENGLISH 1750 GMT 1 NOV 79

((BY MICHAEL DAY, PA BROADCASTING CORRESPONDENT))

((TEXT)) BBC OVERSEAS RADIO BROADCASTS IN SEVEN LANGUAGES

ARE TO BE AXED IN THE GOVERNMENT'S LATEST ROUND OF PUBLIC SPENDING

CUTS.

THE BIGGEST VICTIM IS THE FRENCH SERVICE, WHICH GENERAL DE GAULLE

USED IN 1940 TO BROADCAST TO HIS COUNTRYMEN AFTER FRANCE FELL

TO THE BASTILLE

THE OUTBACKS HAVE BEEN FORCED BY A 2.7 MILLION POUND REDUCTION IN NEXT YEAR'S GRANT TO BBC EXTERNAL SERVICES FROM THE FOREIGN OFFICE.

A FIGURE OF 4 MILLION POUNDS HAD EARLIER BEEN PREDICTED, BUT THIS WAS REVISSED AFTER STRONG PRESSURE FROM BACKBENCH MP'S.

THE EXTERNAL SERVICES NETWORK WILL NOW BROADCAST IN ONLY 33 LANGUAGES, COMPARED TO RUSSIA'S 65 AND AMERICA'S 60.

THE SPENDING AXE HAS FALLEN MAINLY ON EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, SERVICES TO DEVELOPING NATIONS AND COUNTRIES WITHOUT "FREE ACCESS" OF INFORMATION ARE PRESERVED.

SO IS THE WORLD SERVICE, WHICH BROADCASTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD IN ENGLISH.

THE LANGUAGE SERVICES TO BE DISCONTINUED ARE THE FRENCH (WHICH BROADCASTS 42 1/2 HOURS A WEEK), ITALIAN (SEVEN HOURS), GREEK (12 1/2 HOURS), TURKISH (SEVEN HOURS), SPANISH TO SPAIN (SEVEN HOURS), MALTESE (HALF AN HOUR), AND BURMESE (SEVEN HOURS.)

THE CUTS WILL MEAN THE LOSS OF ABOUT 100 BROADCASTING JOBS INITIALLY, WITH ANOTHER 50 STUDIO STAFF MADE REDUNDANT LATER IN A "KNOCK-ON" EFFECT.

THE BBC SAID IT DEPLORED THE OUTBACKS, IT CAME AT A TIME WHEN BRITAIN NEEDED A BETTER UNDERSTANDING IN EUROPE OF ITS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS, SAID A STATEMENT.

THE LOSS OF SEVEN SERVICES WOULD BE IRRETRIEVABLE AND RADIO FREQUENCIES WOULD BE TAKEN OVER BY OTHERS.

THE BBC SAID THE SCRAPPING OF THE FRENCH SERVICE WOULD MEAN THE LOSS OF A SIGNIFICANT AUDIENCE IN AFRICA AT A TIME WHEN COMMUNIST COUNTRIES WERE INCREASING THEIR SERVICES THERE.

THE ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTING STAFFS ALSO CONDEMNED THE DECISION AND SAID THE LOSS OF SEVEN SERVICES WOULD CREATE UNACCEPTABLE GAPS IN THE 19TH OVERSEAS COVERAGE.

AND UNION SAID IT WOULD LEAVE THE BBC OPEN TO A CHARGE OF BIAS.

MERELY A GOVERNMENT PROPAGANDA INSTRUMENT.

IT SAID IT WOULD PRESS THE GOVERNMENT TO REVERSE THE DECISION
BECAUSE THE DAMAGE DONE WOULD BE OUT OF ALL PROPORTION TO THE
SAVINGS MADE.

THE EXTERNAL SERVICES BUDGET HAD RISEN FROM 37 MILLION POUNDS
IN 1978-79 TO 44 MILLION POUNDS THIS FINANCIAL YEAR.

THE BBC HAD WARNED THAT A MILLION POUND CUT IN THE 1980-81
BUDGET WOULD HAVE SIGNALLED THE LOSS OF TEN LANGUAGE SERVICES.

THE WORLD SERVICE REACHES AN AUDIENCE OF BETWEEN 25 AND 30
MILLION, AND THE PRESENT 38 LANGUAGE SERVICES ARE HEARD BY
ABOUT 60 MILLION PEOPLE--EXCLUDING RUSSIA AND CHINA.

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